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# Shifting perception and practice: New Zealand beginning teacher induction and mentoring as a pathway to expertise

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Presented is a cross analysis of seven case studies to show how induction and mentoring worked to shift beginning teachers from a focus on survival and self to student learning. Stage teacher development theories have influenced the support given to beginning teachers, therefore induction tends to prioritise classroom and stress management. This results in lowered expectations to focus on student learning while proficiency in the mechanics of teaching is developed. Yet students in beginning teacher classes are expected to learn at a similar rate as those in the classrooms of experienced teachers. Consequently, there exists a tension between managing the complexity of becoming a teacher and student learning. It is argued in this paper that it is not a case of either/or but that beginning teacher induction should provide support for classroom management, survival, and an early expectation that beginning teachers will focus on developing expertise to progress student learning.

Keywords: beginning teacher learning; development; induction; mentoring.

For many years, stage theories of teacher development have informed early career learning and subsequently induction and mentoring practices (Berliner, 1988; Fuller & Bown, 1975; Kagan, 1992). The typical claims are that in the first year of teaching there is a concern about self as a teacher, survival and tasks, such as classroom management and routines. It is not until the second year that there is a shift of attention to planning for individual student's learning. In the third year a developmental shift takes place, to standardise routines that integrate learning and management, and during this time teaching becomes increasingly automated. In the fourth year, the teacher develops problem solving routines and repertoires, which can be more generalised across contexts (Kagan, 1992, p. 161). Such theories about teacher development have influenced the type of support provided to beginning teachers.

For most first year beginning teachers, support is often about survival and accommodating the stressors of a new and demanding job by providing advice and guidance along with psychological props (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005). Such a limited approach to support can overlook the fact that teachers are still learning when they begin teaching. Yusko and Feiman-Nemser (2008, p. 925) argue that while a "support-orientated approach is a humane response to the challenges of beginning teaching" it "does not offer a comprehensive rationale for serious induction." Serious induction is anchored in a community of learners who are committed to effective teaching. It has the potential to blend teacher and student learning with assessment and support, to help novices develop the expertise to become accomplished teachers (ibid).

Studies have contested the limited approach to beginning teacher development. Grossman (1990) found that beginning teachers can focus on student learning and grapple with complex content knowledge to support learning. Further Achinstein and Barrett (2004), claim that the stage theory development can be interrupted by mentors who assist beginning teachers to reframe problems and to use multiple ways of understanding classroom challenges. Such studies suggest that beginning teachers can attend to complex classroom problems and student learning. Therefore

induction and mentoring should aspire to a purpose that goes beyond management, survival and retention.

Yet induction programmes typically do not challenge new teachers to aspire to emulating or adapting models of teacher expertise. They are typically not presented with a clear view of what constitutes expertise, or an expectation that they will become accomplished teachers. This invisibility of teacher expertise is a problem for beginning teachers. How will they recognise which experienced teachers have expertise; as not all teachers are experts (Hattie & Clinton, 2008). Experienced teachers can be skilled and have a well run classroom where learning is planned, organised, and flows but that does not necessarily mean they are expert teachers. Hattie and Clinton, (2008, p. 319) argue that in the classroom of the expert teacher the beginning teacher would expect to see a complex array of behaviours and dispositions: a “staccato of trial and error, a process of accommodation and assimilation, a refocusing of beliefs and understandings, and often a process of learning, re-learning, and over-learning.” Further, they contended that teachers who have a passion for their job, who have high expectations of themselves and their students and who use others and their own resources can develop the complex attributes of the expert teacher. Unless teachers as beginners are presented with a clear view of what constitutes expertise, guidance to recognise it, and an expectation that they will become accomplished, they are unlikely to aspire to developing expert practices.

Hagger and MacIntyre (2006, p. 33) suggest that expertise can only be recognised and understood when examined in practice. They argue that this is because expertise is “so subtle, so complex, so individual and so context-related, it can only adequately be understood in relation to particular practice, not in general.” They assert that claims about an individual teacher’s expertise can only be substantiated through critical examination of their practice and thinking. Furthermore, research-based knowledge of teachers’ thinking and expert practice should be in the mix when sustaining claims about expertise. Therefore induction programmes serious about developing an accomplished teacher must take cognisance of the practices knowledge and understandings that distinguish a teacher as expert. Equally the programmes should provide the opportunity for beginning teachers to scrutinise expert practices in context so that they can recognise and develop expertise.

Developing expertise in any field also requires commitment and some form of mentoring or coaching to achieve predetermined goals. Teachers who aspire to develop expertise must know the goal-posts and commit and dedicate time, similar to the time and dedication given by aspiring experts in other fields (Hattie, 2009, p. 261). Ireson (2008, p. 44) agrees, observing that “many teachers do not spend time on deliberate practice of the sort found among top musicians and athletes.” She argues that not enough think critically about their practice and specifically set goals to take their own and student learning forward. For beginning teachers to be set on a pathway towards expertise it may necessitate prioritising deliberate, goal orientated learning. This will require not only beginning teacher commitment but the help of a mentor who has the capacity to make transparent to the novice teacher what expertise looks like.

The evidence suggests it is problematic for mentors to set beginning teachers on a developmental pathway towards expertise. This is because most mentors have limited access to sustained professional development, and many have limited knowledge of robust ideas about teacher learning and development (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006). They found that there is a tendency to take a “reductive” approach to mentoring, offering quick fix solutions frequently in the form of workshops and resources (ibid). Moreover, the Teachers Matter (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005) study found that in most countries the mentors’ role is to provide support and fix deficits in areas such as classroom management. To address these reductive and deficit approaches, Norman and Feiman-Nemser (2005, p. 608) advocate an educative form of mentoring that goes beyond support. This approach incorporates a “vision of good teaching,” regards the classroom as a site of inquiry, and teachers as learners who need to think

about how to develop principled teaching practice. It contrasts with a narrow view of mentoring that has the primary purpose of “easing the new teachers” entry, and helping them with the immediate questions and uncertainties that arise when a new teacher enters the classroom for the first time (ibid). Unless mentors are provided with opportunities to learn about mentoring and teacher development, they will remain an underutilised resource, primarily concerned with the enculturation of beginning teachers so that they fit in and reproduce the status quo (Britton, Paine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003a).

The school context in which mentors work and new teachers enter can either enhance or inhibit their development (Bubb & Earley, 2006). Indeed, Timperley’s (2008, p. 6) synthesis of research on teacher learning and development found that teacher learning is strongly shaped by the context and daily experiences, which in turn shape understandings and practices. Numerous studies attest to an association between the development of a teacher’s own professional identity and practice and their interaction with other teachers within the everyday organisational, social and cultural practices of the school (Day, 2002; Flores & Day, 2006; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Moore, Johnson, & Kardos, 2004). It has been found that school leadership, the valued ways of teaching, and the learning opportunities provided affect beginning teachers’ future practice. Youngs’ (2007, p. 126) study supports this premise providing evidence that “elementary principals can promote new teachers’ professional growth in their direct interactions with them and by facilitating their work with mentors and other colleagues”.

The influence of, stage theory development on induction practices, the importance of school context in the development of beginning teachers, and the need to make explicit the nature of teaching expertise, raises germane questions. Can principals, mentors and school staff expect beginning teachers to focus on students’ learning early in their career? What is the place of psychological support and stress management in beginning teacher induction? Will beginning teachers recognise or be receptive to becoming experts or will the demands of such teaching overwhelm them? Will the social constraints of “we do it this way here” overwhelm growing expertise in new teachers? What are the levers that enable teachers to shift from a focus on self to that of students’ learning needs?

While the rationale to focus new teacher learning on the development of expertise is persuasive, the impact of the realities of their new position on their potential, should not be ignored. Numerous researchers argue that the never-ending nature and complexity of teachers’ work, the expanding curriculum, increasing expectations to improve teacher competence, along with burgeoning accountability requirements have led to stress and disillusionment for many experienced teachers (Kane & Mallon, 2006). For beginning teachers, the stress is magnified (Cameron, 2006) and they are less likely to survive if they do not have appropriate support. Nevertheless, a focus on survival diverts attention away from student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006). For novice teachers to manage these competing interests and focus on student learning, induction and mentoring programmes will need to be situated in school contexts where all teachers are engaged in problem solving and committed to student learning.

Despite the call for induction to support beginning teachers in shifting their focus from self and classroom management to student learning, we still know little about induction practices that assist them to do so. Some would argue it is foolish to do this because classroom management, teachers developing a sense of self, and survival is what matters to the development of beginning teachers in their first year (Kagan, 1992). While acknowledging the importance of these factors, the focus of this paper is to better understand the contextual levers and processes that best enable, and in some instances constrain a beginning teacher’s ability to shift their concern from self to student learning. It is argued that not only is it possible to combine support and early career learning but it is also not appropriate to separate them. This is because beginning teachers are given full responsibility for student learning from the outset. Yet there are constraints and challenges that need to be addressed.

## The context

Since 1985 New Zealand (NZ) has been committed to early career teacher development, evident through the national provision of comprehensively resourced induction. In NZ all beginning teachers must have an approved teaching qualification to become provisionally registered to teach. The provisional registration status is typically for the first two years of a teacher's career. During this time beginning teachers must provide evidence that they can meet national criteria for registration as a teacher. The criteria were developed by the New Zealand Teachers Council. All schools are provided with policy, guidelines, funding and time. For example, the Ministry of Education provides primary schools with a 0.2 staffing remuneration in the first year, and 0.1 in the second year, of a beginning teacher's employment. Experienced teachers who are appointed to mentor the beginning teacher receive a \$2000 supplementary allowance. These on-site mentor teachers support the first two years of the novice teacher's practice and facilitate the gathering of evidence that beginning teachers require to meet the national criteria for full teacher registration. The funding provides mentor and beginning teacher release time to be used as each school determines. Further national advisory services provided beginning teacher support usually in the form of off-site workshops.

International and national studies have identified positive aspects of the New Zealand system; for example, Wong (2005, p. 42) described NZ induction as "state of the art." Yet national studies (Battersby, 1989; Cameron, Dingle & Brooking, 2007; Dewar, Keneedy, Staig & Lois, 2003; Education Review Office, 2004; Rennick, 2001) have highlighted inconsistencies in the quality of the induction provided. As Cameron et al. (2007, p. 109) found, "many workplaces do not appear to have provided the quality and frequency of specific pedagogical support that would be likely to lead to more effective teaching and successful learning." New Zealand is not alone, as Totterdell, Bubb, Woodroffe, and Hanrahan, (2004) reported, in England not all newly qualified teachers received their entitlements as newly qualified teachers.

Britton, Paine, Pimm, and Raizen, (2003b, p. 334) found that the NZ programmes were well crafted to support the "status quo" and teachers "fitting-in." The tendency to support traditional practice has also been identified in the USA. Sparks (2005, pp. 242-243) argue that the mentor-beginning teacher relationship can simply serve "to further entrench current practice and heighten the resistance to serious reform of teaching and learning" unless mentors are carefully selected and trained to act as "embodiments of the desired future of teaching and learning in the school." Cameron (2007) contended that for induction and mentoring programmes to be effective, they need to be integrated into effective school structures and culture, thus embedding the notion that induction is an introduction to career-long professional learning and development to strengthen teaching and student learning.

In response to research that has identified inconsistencies in the quality of beginning teacher induction experiences, along with a lack of educative mentoring the New Zealand Teachers Council has developed national draft guidelines for induction and mentoring programmes and mentor teacher development (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2009). The guidelines have been designed to *shift* induction and mentoring practices rather than embed existing practice. For example, the guidelines state that an educative model of induction and mentoring should be transformative in nature and should benefit the full range of learners in NZ schools. The draft set of skills, knowledge and attributes for mentor teachers identified in the guidelines focuses on abilities such as providing critical, evidence-based feedback to beginning teachers, rather than enculturation to the particular workplace or "handy tips" based on the preferred practices of the mentor teacher. This paper examines ways in which fourteen beginning teachers in seven schools experienced induction and mentoring to advance their learning and practice to focus on student learning

## **The collective case of beginning teacher learning and professional development**

An interpretive, multi-site case study approach was used to investigate beginning teachers' experiences of induction programmes. The analysis draws on seven case studies, which were instrumental in theorising the collective case of beginning teacher learning. Each school had nationally resourced, pre-existing on-site induction but embedded in everyday practice. The case study method was used as a means of investigating induction in complex primary school social settings where there is little control over events or variables. The intention is to illuminate the beginning teachers' experiences of induction and mentoring to bring about "the discovery of new meaning, extend the readers' experience, or confirm what is known" (Merriam, 1991, p. 30).

The sample of seven suburban schools were purposively selected for their good induction programmes based on criteria that included: publicly available external school evaluations, the researchers' insider knowledge, recommendations from academic and advisory staff working in schools, feedback from teachers and confirmation from principals that they perceived that their schools' induction practices were good. The schools selected provided a balance between beginning teachers' lived experiences in well-established schools in different socio-economic settings (two low, one middle and three high); and a range of school types catering for students from 11-12 years (Pisa school), 5-12 years (Arrogan school) and 5-10 years (Messina, Verona, Norfolk and Windsor schools).

Thirty five participants were involved in the project: seven principals, 14 beginning teachers (7 year 1 & 7 year 2), along with 14 mentors. This included one principal, two beginning teachers (year 1 & 2) and two mentor teachers (year 1 & 2) from each school. All beginning teachers had graduated with either a three year Bachelor of Education in Teaching or a qualification that combined an undergraduate degree with a one year teacher education programme. The programmes each had a minimum of fourteen weeks practical school placements. Further all beginning teachers were interviewed by the principals and/or school staff and they all indicated they were committed and keen to take up their positions.

The primary sources of data were 35 interview transcriptions, three focus groups and documentation collected between 2004 and 2006. In each school the principal, the two mentors and the two beginning teachers were interviewed. The interviews were all similarly designed and semi-structured, each lasting between sixty and ninety minutes. In addition, approximately nine months after the individual interviews, three taped focus group interviews were recorded, one each with principals, mentors and beginning teachers. Documentation was received from six of the seven schools and case notes kept.

Analysis of the data was an iterative process, which involved making inferences and developing themes and models to move beyond the empirically obvious to a conceptual understanding of beginning teacher learning as played out in and across the schools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1991). Analysis occurred at three levels, firstly data was analysed to identify the learning experiences of beginning teachers that advanced their ability to focus on student learning in individual schools from their own perspective and that of the principals and mentor teachers. Secondly in search of patterns and outliers of experiences; a cross-school examination of transcripts, case notes and documentation across and between principal, mentor and beginning teachers took place. The third level of analysis of the focus group data was on expectations and improving beginning teacher learning along with the vision held of the teacher. Triangulation of data sources and participants ensured there was weight of evidence to confirm and disconfirm findings.

The results provide an examination of how induction and mentoring worked to shift beginning teachers' focus on survival and self to a focus on student learning in their first year of teaching. Examples illustrate the way in which the school, the principal, the school culture and mentors provide leverage and benefit to the beginning teachers to focus on student learning. The key levers and benefits which enabled them to make such a shift are outlined. Discussed is how beginning

teacher learning, induction and mentoring can be instrumental in moving the field beyond the limited perception of how beginning teachers develop, to a view of teacher learning that prioritises student learning. The conclusion highlights three key problems to be addressed to provide beginning teachers with the leverage and benefits evident in these case studies.

The number of cases, the suburban sample and interpretative methods, limit the generalisations that can be made. Even so the rich, reflexive interpretation of complex practices, in school contexts, allowed cross analysis to develop a working theory of key learning levers, which does not preclude the reader from drawing their own conclusions and transferring the findings to other situations.

### **Principals and mentors as levers for change**

In the seven schools, principals and mentors were perceived as key levers in affecting beginning teachers to shift their concerns from themselves as teachers to student learning. Of the fourteen beginning teachers in the study two had a focus on students' learning within the first three months of teaching; eight by the end of the first six months; and for four the shift occurred within nine months. There is evidence that by providing particular school conditions and professional development opportunities, the principals influenced both mentors and beginning teachers to focus on their own learning and that of the students.

#### ***Lever one: school principals and culture***

The leverage the school principal had to encourage school leaders and teachers to contribute to beginning teacher learning was found in the seven schools to be mostly beneficial. In all schools, notwithstanding very different socio-economic communities, principals created cultures and utilised resources to provide planned and opportunistic learning that was responsive to the immediacy of beginning teachers' work but also focused them on their students. This was achieved through the articulation of particular school philosophies all of which were committed to the development of supportive school cultures to strengthen pedagogy and student learning. Principals noted that their attitude towards professional development had shifted from a deficit approach, to building on strengths through reflection on evidence of beginning teacher planning and practice. The principal from Windsor illustrated this when he said, "We used to be more judgmental, observing and advising on what needed to be fixed. The focus now is on reflection, feedback evidence/data, and professional learning conversations...the power of learning together."

Principals strategically planned and resourced whole school professional development along with beginning teacher induction. Benefits to the beginning teacher were attributed to principals' high expectations of all staff to engage in ongoing learning. The principal from Windsor school noted, "We are trying to put a lot more responsibility on children at a young age to help them become independent thinkers... All teachers, - beginning teachers - need to be up with the play." As a consequence, beginning teachers entered environments where expectations were high and there was an existing focus on student and teacher learning, as illustrated by second year teacher from Arragon school when she said, "My principal is very focused on us [beginning teachers], on the children, she is constantly getting back to the children...What are the children learning? What can you do to see them progress?"

Exposure to good role models with a view of good teaching was considered essential to teacher development. Both mentors and principals argue that even with experience and openness to learning beginning teachers would not flourish in environments that did not have appropriate role models and learning opportunities. This was underpinned by the belief that these early experiences would affect future practice. For example, the year one mentor from Arragon said, "I think the way you operate as a teacher is shaped by the schools you teach in your early years and the colleagues that you work with."

The school cultures provided beginning teachers with models of the way teachers talked about their professional lives, organised themselves and worked. Principals spoke about the place of professional talk, current literature, questioning and critical thinking to inform and progress individual teachers teaching. For instance, the principal from Arragon school explained, “there’s a lot of professional talk here...teachers must constantly engage in and grow through professional discussion both on a formal and informal basis, we question and ask questions to get people thinking in a secure environment; that’s when thinking, real critical thinking takes place.” A further comment from the first year mentor from Windsor illustrates the place of professional conversations in advancing thinking and practice about student learning. She said, “It’s about what I have done, what worked well, why a child isn’t learning.” Beginning teachers welcomed professional talk about students and student’s work, over talk about the tricks of the trade. The second year beginning teacher from Pisa said. “The tricks of the trade to a certain extent don’t interest me. It is the more in-depth discussion...What can we do?...you have to go deeper to find the things that actually benefit the students ...often the tricks of the trade benefit the teacher more than the student.” It was through professional talk that beginning teachers gained clarity about expectations and what was considered expert practice.

Building on knowledge about curriculum and practice was expected but time to do so required planning. In an attempt to address the lack of time for professional conversations, the schools used staff meetings to engage in discussion about teaching practice and professional readings to support student learning. This point is illustrated by the first year mentor from Arragon who said, “At our staff meetings we get professional readings, there is a culture in our school of thinking and being reflective.” In addition, beginning teachers and mentors reported discussing at team meetings current literature related to pedagogy, curricula and assessment to inform practice. Such engagement, beginning teachers stated, helped them recognise the value of building their knowledge and practice to progress student learning.

Not surprisingly working collaboratively and constructively strengthened beginning teachers’ confidence to ask for help and trial different approaches, particularly when an individual student was not progressing. They reported that the culture of the school was important to how they developed and perceived themselves, affecting their “self esteem” and “confidence” and ability to question and seek support. The second year teacher from Norfolk school, who reported that the teachers in her school were “very academic”, illustrated this when she said, “The minute I walked in the door ...I was overwhelmed by what everybody knew...I think I went home and cried for the first two weeks and then I realised...I could go and ask these people about things and they were helpful. It was wonderful.” Predictably beginning teachers reported that not feeling confident impacted on their learning with the majority claiming it was easy for their confidence to be undermined. The second year beginning teacher from Windsor claimed that his lack of confidence related to feelings of insecurity and vulnerability but were ameliorated by the school’s induction practices.

Both beginning teachers and mentors argue that a school culture that was not supportive could cause new teachers to retreat into the relative isolation of their classrooms, which they said inhibited their development and the refinement of practice. For example, the first year beginning teacher from Messina said when his confidence was low he tended to retreat to his classroom with the consequence of becoming, “too locked into my own world” and repeating the same mistakes. Principals were concerned about the isolated nature of teachers work. The principal from Norfolk illustrated this point when she said, “Teaching...they’re in a single cell with children - all on their own. When they shut the door and they are on their own, where’s the regulating arm? How do I really know what goes on in that classroom between the children and the teacher?”

Several strategies were used by schools to break down the isolation for beginning teachers. One example was placing the beginning teacher and mentor in close physical proximity. This was reported to ease formal and informal communication, which in turn created the opportunity for “just-in-time” learning. Five of the schools had a published open-door policy, which facilitated

teacher movement in and out of each other's classrooms, sharing ideas and insights. This appeared to increase conversations and observations particularly of students. Breaking down isolated practice was reported to improve relationships, increase collaborative practice and reduce stress.

There was a keen awareness of the potential for work overload and the subsequent stress on the beginning teacher. Teachers' workload was frequently described as "overwhelming" by principals, mentors and beginning teachers and viewed as counterproductive to advancing teacher learning to focus on student learning. The principal from Norfolk noted that, "Teachers turn themselves inside out trying to meet the demands and sometimes it doesn't matter what they are doing it's never enough." The second year teacher from Windsor comment echoed this view when he said, "Endless work, endless forms and reports. Sometimes you think, well I just want to teach, I don't want to have to write about it endlessly." The induction programme did give beginning teachers time and support to manage the stressors of the job, to manage as Kennedy aptly describes (1999, p. 12) "the bustle of immediacy." The impact of work overload and the boundless nature of teachers' work on decisions about what to prioritise was commented on by the first year mentor from Syracuse, she said, "You would actually spend more than 24 hours a day to do this job perfectly. So inevitably you are going to let something slide in favour of something else...." The mentor teacher was central to beginning teachers managing the stressors associated with their new role and making the shift from a concern about them managing the immediate to thoughtful decision-making about student learning.

### ***Lever two: the mentor teacher***

The role the mentor teacher plays to leverage beginning teachers' thinking about self as a teacher to student learning was recognised by all seven principals. As the principal from Norfolk noted, "It's a big ask of the beginning teacher to have us look at the data to gauge children's learning and the beginning teacher's credibility...they will be thinking, Oh I have just got through the day: but that's their job." He argued that the mentor's role was to steer beginning teacher thinking and practice by asking such questions as: "What are the children learning? Did they enjoy it? And how do you know?"

An assumption was made that mentors would have the skills to help beginning teachers' focus on student learning. However few accessed training apart from the occasional attendance at a workshop, despite principals perceiving them as key to beginning teacher development. A willingness to learn, and to support this learning was apparent, as all mentors and principals reported they would value access to mentor education programmes. While mentors willingly provided emotional support and advice about classroom management and administration matters, it was mentoring that enabled beginning teachers to grapple with student learning that most interested these mentor teacher. Each mentor worked with their beginning teacher to design a programme that supported individual learning needs. The quote from the second year mentor from Syracuse School illustrates the complexity of the programmes organised:

We had one day a week release. We juggled it; it was timetabled and programme and we organised it so that there were opportunities for her [beginning teacher] to go and work on her planning and observe other people in the school. We sent her away to other schools, lower decile [socio-economic] so she could see the same level in a different setting. Obviously the interplay between myself going in and observing her and her coming and observing myself was part of it. Spending time working with her in her classroom meant that I knew her children well. We timetabled term by term so there was a sort of direction to what we were going to do. It was done with her input and my direction. It's an important balance to achieve. (SSTT2).

The 14 mentors had their own understanding of good teaching but this understanding did not bind them as they did not insist that beginning teachers' taught in similar ways. Instead the approach to their role was open-minded, allowing the beginning teacher to trial their own ideas. They talked with the beginning teacher about pedagogy, and ways to solve problems that allowed each

beginning teacher's beliefs about teaching and student learning to develop. They were keenly aware that confidence levels were central to the beginning teacher's ability to thrive. For example, listening and questioning, rather than offering direction were the preferred strategies used by the first year mentor from Syracuse school; but she was aware like the other mentors, that it was a "balancing act." Her goal was to prevent beginning teachers from becoming disillusioned. She, like others, discussed the judgement calls she had to make as her beginning teacher juggled his ideals about teaching and student learning with the realities of the classroom.

The tension between giving instruction to ensure survival, and allowing the freedom to implement their own ideas was a challenge to all mentors. One mentor and beginning teacher felt too much freedom was given early on in the first year, while another beginning teacher and mentor reported that too much direction undermined confidence, as the Syracuse year two mentor explained it is a fine line between going in and saying "this is how I do it and this is how I would do it, and letting them do it without stumbling too much. It's such a balance; you've got to be so careful." She considered it important not to go in saying, "I'm the teacher with twenty years experience and you should be doing it like this...". The year one mentor teacher from Windsor captured the essence of the above concerns when she said, "Sometimes you have to move from walking alongside to walking ahead, taking the lead, giving direction or redirection." Certainly mentors talked about developing the "wisdom" to gauge when to let beginning teachers go with their ideas and when to intervene. All felt it was important not to squash ideas and innovation. The benefit for beginning teachers was an evolving image of what constituted accomplished teaching and an evolving knowledge of expert practices.

Supporting new teachers to trial ideas meant that mistakes were inevitable. Nonetheless learning from mistakes and "talking, talking" about practice was considered beneficial to beginning teacher development. To normalise mistakes, mentors reported sharing insights and errors of judgment with the beginning teachers and other colleagues. A beginning teacher in the focus group illustrated this point when he said, "It is novel for me to do badly, she normalises it for me by relating back her experiences [of mistakes] and provides me with advice I can act on; she makes me feel normal and I can accept my failures." The articulation of fallibility by experienced teachers reassured beginning teachers and gave them courage to try different approaches to teaching, shifting their perception from failure to learning. Hattie (2009, p. 37) in his meta analysis of visible teaching and learning argues that student achievement is enhanced in environments where "teachers can talk about their teaching, where errors or learning opportunities are seen as critical learning opportunities, where discarding incorrect knowledge and understandings is welcomed, and where teachers can feel safe to learn, to re-learn, and explore their own knowledge and understanding."

### ***Mentor strategies***

There were common strategies that all the mentors used that helped beginning teachers manage their workload, prioritise areas for improvement and strengthen certain practices in ways that focused them on student learning. These included goal setting, observation, feedback, and reflection. Goal setting was reported as a process that enabled the beginning teacher to make the complex task of teaching manageable. Furthermore, it focused the mentor's feedback and provided evidence of beginning teacher development. Goal setting was modelled throughout each school as teachers were appraised annually against school-wide and individually set goals.

Classroom observations provided the opportunity for evidence based feedback and professional conversations. Feedback was an intervention that in some circumstances advanced learning and at other times acted as an inhibitor with the potential to undermine confidence. As this beginning teacher from Messima illustrated, receiving critical feedback in the first year could erode confidence, "as beginning teachers everything is happening in a new world...they [mentor teachers] should have high expectations but be sensitive when they feedback". The mentors were aware of the beginning teacher's fragile state in the early months of teaching and discussed the importance of

providing positive feedback that adequately challenged and scaffolded learning to progress their practice. Observation was particularly powerful when mentors modelled teaching in the beginning teacher's class giving them the opportunity to observe their own students engagement in learning. This increased the beginning teacher's knowledge of the individual student. Further, the ability to observe informally was enhanced by open door classroom school policies as teachers moved freely in and out of each other's classrooms. Observation was reported as beneficial as it prompted new thinking about pedagogical practice and developed deeper understanding of student's learning needs.

Mentors asserted that reflection and evaluation required modelling throughout the school. One school had a requirement that all teachers provided a written reflection of their teaching, and children's learning and achievement, at the end of each term (typically ten weeks). The beginning teachers identified reflection as a tool they used to focus their practice on student learning. In the mentor teachers' opinion, without this modelling beginning teachers were inclined to prioritise classroom management and meeting deadlines as they became overpowered by what seemed to be the enormity of their tasks. This had the potential to marginalise reflection on student learning.

As beginning teachers focused more on student learning, they reported an increase in job satisfaction. This is illustrated by the second year beginning teacher from Pisa when he said, "I love seeing the excitement in children when they figure something out" and the beginning teacher from Arragon when she said, "I'm still high on the academic scores they got." Notwithstanding the, at times, overwhelming workload, the ability to focus on learning and the growing sense of job satisfaction (expressed by all beginning teachers) was attributed to their own commitment and the two key levers: the school and the induction and mentoring they experienced. As the second year beginning teacher from Messima School said, "My desire to be a better teacher, that makes me one, but also the support, the observation of my teaching, the constant feedback and feed-forward of ideas and the type of support. I couldn't be a better teacher by myself."

(Figure 1)

The short term benefits (within three to six months) created by principals and mentors was that beginning teachers experienced a decrease in stress as they became better informed about the way the school operates. This included increased clarity about expectations and recognition of acceptable teaching practice in the school. A reduction in stress was further facilitated by the recognition that, like their students, all teachers are learners and fallible; and that mistakes are chances to learn. Other benefits came from an increased understanding that in a crowded curriculum decisions need to be made about prioritise. Beginning teacher's self-efficacy strengthened as they worked alongside their mentors and colleagues to develop their practice and got to know students better.

Medium term benefits (within three to nine months) were a decreased concern about managing the class and an increased concern with individual student learning. This shift in concern was reflected in the beginning teacher's goals, which came to focus more on student learning than classroom management. Confidence levels improved with regard to classroom observations and receiving feedback; and there was evidence of a greater acceptance of their own fallibility and willingness to use mistakes to improve practice. Also evident was an increased alignment between their practice and the school's high expectations. As collegial professional relationships strengthened, stronger links were made between student learning and teachers' collaborative work and conversations. The beginning teachers had greater clarity about the type of teaching that was valued and greater confidence in their personal agency when making decisions about student's learning and classroom matters. Increased job satisfaction from student learning and achievements was also noted.

Further research is required to investigate whether such medium term benefits can endure to achieve the long term effect of beginning teachers who hold images of teacher expertise and a commitment to progressing their knowledge and practice to become accomplished teachers concerned with progressing student learning. Suggested in this study is that acquiring short and medium term benefits could mean that beginning teachers will have knowledge and understanding of what accomplished teaching looks like, along with the practices and dispositions to progress their development and expertise. The question of effects and sustainability of benefits is a vexed but not a trivial pursuit. Strong (2009) in his assessment of the evidence of effective induction mentoring calls for research that definitely shows that induction and mentoring can make a difference to student learning.

## **Discussion**

Much can be learned from the case of beginning teacher induction and mentoring about combining management and survival support with the expectation that the beginning teachers will focus on developing expertise to positively affect student learning. Many would contest the wisdom of focusing on student learning in the early stage of a teacher's career notwithstanding developing an understanding of expertise in practice, but the examples presented here suggest that school leaders and mentors can provide the context and conditions for this to occur.

The correspondence between teacher expertise and student learning is well established (Berliner, 1994; Hattie & Clinton, 2008). What is contested is recognising expertise, and particularly the ability of novice teachers to do so. So how does the beginning teacher become familiar with good teaching practice to develop an understanding of what expertise looks like? Rather than providing a "blue -print" for distinguishing teacher expertise Hagger and McIntyre, (2006, p. 35) suggested expertise is better understood by asking questions about the appropriateness, significance, and achievement of a teacher's goals, and the attainment and learning of students. This, they argue, should be accompanied with questions about the teacher's thinking and the way research relates to practice. Such an approach facilitates discussion and recognises the evolving nature of expertise as teachers seek to accommodate change and societal expectations. In this study, mentors and beginning teachers embraced learning together using goal-setting, evidence/data, written reflections, feedback and literature when engaging in professional learning conversations. The emphasis was not on becoming more efficient when problem solving, which Bransford, Derry, Berliner, Hammerness and Beckett, (2005, pp. 50-51) argue has a danger of "producing "functionally fixed" behaviours that are problematic in new situations," but rather the focus was working with colleagues, innovating, unlearning and relearning (ibid).

The similarity between Hagger and McIntyre's (2006) method for distinguishing and assessing expertise, and the activities and processes beginning teachers experienced in their induction programmes, suggests that these beginning teachers were privy to practices that exposed the more experienced teachers' tacit knowledge and practice. All teachers were expected to continue learning and not to become complacent. Mistakes were accepted and queried. As Ericsson (2002, p. 18) argues, "One of the most crucial challenges for aspiring expert performers is to avoid arrested development associated with generalized automaticity of performance and to acquire the most crucial skills to support continued learning and improvement." The approach to novice teacher learning, in this study, paralleled that of experienced teachers, with all teachers engaged in learning, and all having relative autonomy over their professional development goals. While the level of expertise of the teachers in the schools was not assessed, it is likely that these beginning teachers were provided with models of teacher expertise in practice.

This study demonstrated that principals can provide real leverage to shift novice teachers' thinking and practice to student learning when they promote a school culture where all teachers are focused on learning, provide resources for induction and professional development, and when they

give mentors and beginning teachers the autonomy to design flexible, inquiry-based induction programmes that are both responsive and challenging. While Kagan (1992, p. 155) argues that a developmental focus on student learning will occur in the second year of teaching she does suggest that the principal and mentor teacher (“cooperating teacher”) may be two contextual factors of special importance to shifting the novice teacher from a controlling attitude towards students to “become better able to recognize problems and to develop more complex and coherent repertoires for solving problems.” In this case Kagan’s premise is confirmed. The working conditions created by the principals enabled beginning teachers to question their teaching, and problem solve with their mentors and teaching colleagues, about student learning. The study suggests that conditions can be created where in-context beginning teacher induction can provide both support for survival and classroom management *and* for beginning teachers to develop, early in their career, practice to progress student learning. As Baron aptly argues (2006, p. 135) “The big work is to create systems that support teacher learning and development on site, as a matter of everyday life.” This comes with significant challenges, as the principals in the seven schools highlighted,

A challenge for the mentors was learning on the job. Professional development for mentors was not available beyond the occasional one-off workshop and the national guidelines for schools “Towards Full Registration”. Nevertheless, beginning teachers in this study attributed mentors with the characteristics and behaviours that aligned with a form of educative mentoring; described by Norman and Fieman-Nemser (2005, p. 680) as having a vision of good teaching and responding “to new teacher present needs while helping them interpret what their students say and do, and figure out how to move their learning forward.” Nonetheless, it is not acceptable to leave mentors to fend for themselves if the education sector is serious about lifting teacher quality. The deep, tacit knowledge that guides mentoring practice should be made explicit. As Achinstein and Athanases (2006) assert “making mentors needs to be cast as a deliberate act that rests on a knowledge base for effective mentoring.” Further it is not possible for beginning teachers to thrive in school cultures that are stagnant. Beginning teachers and mentors need to “fit in”, and learn together, in schools that are committed to inspirational and transformative learning and practice.

## **Conclusion**

The work of the principals and mentors in the seven schools demonstrates that they have the potential to act as key levers to shift the beginning teacher’s initial concern with “self” as a teacher, to a focus on the learning needs of students in their classrooms. The pitfall is that not all beginning teachers experience such leverage. Three fundamental problems need to be addressed to counter this situation. The first is the dominant perception that induction should be limited to a focus on classroom management and on helping the beginning teacher to survive. This view limits thinking about induction practices and contributes to “reductive conceptions of novices,” lower expectations, and supports lower order learning (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006, p. 7). The second problem is the lack of a collective understanding of the knowledge base to inform the professional learning of mentors and principals. Required is the need to make public models of mentors’ and principals’ knowledge to provide leaders with a clear purpose and understanding of how context and mentoring can provide a pathway for beginning teachers to develop expertise. Thirdly, is the contentious problem of recognising and developing teacher expertise. But as argued at the beginning of this paper, unless principals and mentors provide their novice teachers with a clear view of what constitutes expertise and expect that they will become accomplished teachers, they are unlikely to aspire to become experts in their field. Addressing these three key problems could go some way to transcending the idiosyncratic nature of the different school contexts beginning teachers’ experience, with the proviso that in-school induction and mentoring are resourced.

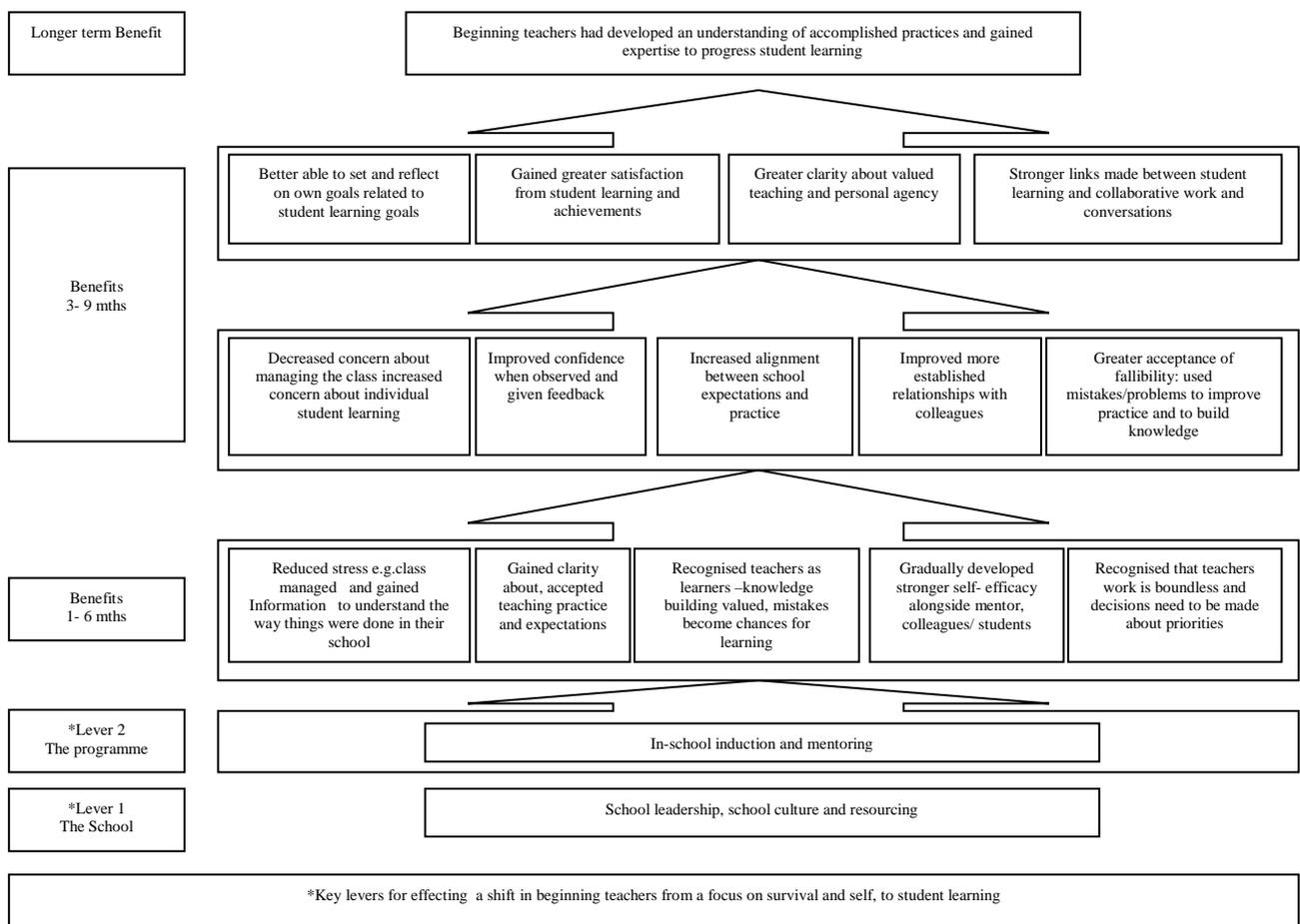


Figure 1. How induction and mentoring benefited beginning teachers to shift from a focus on survival and self to student learning.

### Notes on contributors

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